

# The Confessor's Tongue for January 20, A. D. 2013

33<sup>rd</sup> Week After Pentcost; St. Euthymius the Great

In honor of St. Maximus the Confessor, whose tongue and right hand were cut off in an attempt by compromising authorities to silence his uncompromising confession of Christ's full humanity & divinity.

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## January 20: St. Euthymius the Great

Venerable Euthymius was born during the reign of Emperor Gratian in Melitene in Great Armenia (on the Euphrates) where he was ordained a presbyter. Having loved monastic life, at age 29 he secretly departed for Jerusalem and, having visited the holy places, settled in a cave near the Tharan Laura in the vicinity of Jerusalem. Here he gave all to the Lord, spending all his time in uninterrupted prayer, labor and strict abstinence. Through five years of asceticism in the Tharan Laura he left for the desert and settled in a mountain cave, on the right side of the road to Jericho. The holy life of the ascetic, his humility and meekness, compassion and mercy for neighbor caused many others to flock to him, and in such a way a great monastery arose that was subsequently called the Euthymius Laura. A strict ascetic, Euthymius ate food only on Saturday and Sunday, never lay down, but slept on a box, sitting or standing and held by a cord tied to the corner of his cell. The Lord granted the holy man pleasing to Him with the grace of working wonders and clairvoyance. Through prayer he caused rain to fall from the sky, healed the incurably sick and banished demons and had the gift to foresee the spiritual condition of people. The Holy Church glorifies him as "an exceedingly merciful physician for the sick, an all-glorious feeder of the hungry, a guide of the ignorant, a chastiser of the indifferent and a defender of the orphan and the poor". Having predicted his blessed death for a week, he reposed peacefully in 473 at the age of 97 years. The Russian Hegumen Daniel saw the relics of St. Euthymius in his monastery in Palestine at the beginning of the Twelfth Century.

## St. Maximus and His Teaching

Tonight an tomorrow we celebrate the feast of our Patron, St. Maximus the Confessor, one of the Churches profoundest theologians (in the top three for certain) and the writer whose works occupy a greater proportion of the famous *Philokalia* than anyone else's.

The Church honors the memory of the Venerable Maximus with two feasts during the year: January 21 and August 13. Because the latter feast corresponds with the leavetaking of Transfiguration, the celebration of the summer feast of St. Maximus is transferred to August 12.

St. Maximus was an official in the court of the Emperor Heraclius of the East Roman Empire. About the year 614, after having served the emperor for three years, Maximus, longing for a life of solitude, of *bessychia*, left his position and became a monk. He lived the rest of his life as a simple monk, never being ordained.

St. Maximus' keen mind was illuminated with the light of Christ through his ascetic struggles, and he wrote extensively about the spiritual life based in the writings of those who had gone before and his own experience of those truths. But in 634, through his association with St. Sophronius, Patriarch of Jerusalem, St. Maximus was enrolled in the struggle against the Monothelite heresy, which taught that Jesus Christ had had only one will—a divine one. But for Christ to lack a human will was to render Him less than fully human. The consequences of this were not merely academic, for as St. Gregory the Theologian had taught, "What is not assumed is not healed." If Christ had not assumed a human will, then man's will was not healed by Christ—and it was man's will above all, perhaps, that needed to be healed. Man could not be saved if Christ lacked a human will. For the rest of his life, and sometimes nearly alone, St. Maximus eloquently defended Christ's full divinity in the face of political pressure, heretics, and wavering churchmen. He was tried by imperial authorities, condemned, and exiled three times: in 655, 656, and finally, in 662. The last time, his right hand and his tongue, the instruments of his teaching, were cut off. He died in exile shortly afterwards on August 13, 662.

St. Maximus bears the titles "venerable" and "Confessor". "Venerable" (*prepodobnii*) is the title given to monastic saints. "Confessor" (*ispovednik*) is the glorious title given to a saint who has been persecuted and has suffered for the Faith.

One of the Church's most profound theologians, St. Maximus possessed equally profound insight into the spiritual life which he acquired through his practice of it. True Christian life always consists both of believing and confessing the right doctrine as well as doing the right things or living the right way (the path of love). In his writings, the intimate relation between theology and spirituality is manifest. Christian spirituality (how one approaches and interacts with God in and by the Holy Spirit) depends on Christian theology (what is said about God—what God is like determines how you approach Him); Christian theology, likewise, is confirmed and illuminated in the experience of the true God in the spiritual life. If the Church's confession of who God is, and especially, who Jesus Christ is, becomes corrupt or distorted, it cannot but have a corrupting influence on spiritual life.

St. Maximus teaches that there are three faculties of the soul: the noetic (not to be confused with the intellect or brain), the concupiscent (desiring) and the irascible (temper). There is a proper use for each, and there are misuses of each, which are sinful. Regular misuse results in a sinful habit. To overcome a fixed habit of pleasure related to the concupiscent element, one needs the continual exercise of fasting,

vigils, and payer. To overcome a habit of temper, kindness, benevolence, love, and mercy are needed.

Sin in action is preceded by sin in thought. "For unless anyone sins first in thought, he will never sin in deed." As a result the war with sinful thoughts is far harder to win than the war with sinful actions. To prevail over thoughts, Maximus counsels, "Take care of your passions and you will easily drive thoughts from your mind. Thus for fornication—fast, keep vigil, work hard, keep to yourself. For anger and hurt—disdain reputation, dishonor, and material things. For grudges—pray for the one who has hurt you, and you will be rid of them."

"A passion is a movement of the soul contrary to nature either toward irrational love or senseless hate of something or on account of something material." Furthermore, "the beginning of all passions is love of self, and the end is pride. Self-love is irrational love of the body, and if one eliminates this, he eliminates along with it all the passions stemming from it."

About money, St. Maximus says there are three sinful reasons for loving it: "pleasure-seeking, vainglory, and lack of faith. And more serious than the other two is lack of faith." There is also a virtuous reason for acquiring money: the financial administrator acquires money "so that he might never run short in relieving each one's need."

St. Maximus' teaching offers us many more spiritual riches than we can recount here. Many of his writings are found in volume two of the *Philokalia*. His work entitled *400 Chapters on Love* should be known and applied by all Christians. He wrote many other works, including *200 Chapters on Theology*, and commentaries on the Lord's Prayer and the Divine Liturgy.

St. Maximus shines as an example both of faithfulness to the Truth and as one who practiced the life he taught to others. His teachings instruct us not only in the mysteries of the highest theology, but also in how to live the Christian life, conquer our passions, attain the love of God and our fellow man, and be deified. Let us honour his memory by receiving his instruction and striving to follow his example in our own time.

The ikos from the canon of Matins for the saint well sums up his life:

Showing thyself to be an emulator of the sufferings of the Savior, and having Him in thy soul, O most blessed one who art most rich, thou didst appoint ascents in thy heart. And He hath given thee grace from heaven; for thou didst manfully oppose the tyrants, O wise one; and preaching the unoriginate, divine, and consubstantial Trinity, and denouncing the heretics who fought against God, thou didst endure boundless trials, O venerable and most praised one: the severing of thy theologizing tongue together with thy hand. Yet didst thou not cease to speak with boldness, confirming the faithful with thy divine teachings, manifestly preaching the transcendent and unoriginate Trinity unto all the people.

This year, we begin what we envision to be an annual custom of offering a lecture in honor of St.

Maximus by which he and his works may be better known, understood, and appreciated.

The person who truly wishes to be healed is he who does not refuse treatment. This treatment consists of the pain and distress brought on by various misfortunes. He who refuses them does not realize what they accomplish in this world or what he will gain from them when he departs this life.

*St. Maximus, 400 Chapters on Love, 4.82*

### Prayer of the 19<sup>th</sup> Kathisma

*In the traditional Orthodox Psalter, which is the primary prayerbook of the Church, each of the 20 kathismata (divisions) of the Psalter is followed by the trisagion prayers, three troparia and a longer prayer. Here is one of those prayers for your benefit.*

O Master Christ God, who hast healed my passions by Thy Passion and hast cured my wounds by Thy Wounds, grant tears of remorse unto me who have sinned greatly against Thee. Prepare for my body some of the fragrance of Thy life-creating Body, and sweeten the bitterness of my soul by Thy precious Blood, wherewith vouchsafe me, who doth resist Thee, to drink. Raise aloft to Thee my mind which is drawn downwards, and lead it up from the depths of destruction, for I have no repentance, I have no remorse, I have no tears of comfort which lead children to their inheritance. I have been darkened in mind amid the passions of life, and am unable to lift up mine eyes to Thee in my pain; I cannot warm myself with tears of love for Thee. Yet, O Lord and Master, Jesus Christ, Treasury of blessings, grant me complete repentance and a heart diligent in searching for Thee. Grant me Thy grace, and renew in me the lineaments of Thine image. I have forsaken Thee; do not forsake me! Come Thou in search of me, and lead me up to Thy green pasture, and number me among the sheep of Thy chosen flock. Feed me with them on the grass of Thy divine mysteries, through the prayers of Thy most pure Mother and of all Thy saints. Amen.

### Upcoming Events 2012-2013

- 20-21 January: Feast of St. Maximus with John Granger. Talk on St. Maximus Sunday, January 20<sup>th</sup> at 4:30 p.m.; Talk for Youth "Why Reading Matters: Great Books, Popular Literature, and the Life in Christ?" (Harry Potter, Bella Swan, Katniss Everdeen and the Life in Christ?), Monday, January 21, 11:30 a.m.
- 17 March: Forgiveness Vespers, 6:00 p.m. We ask that all who consider St. Maximus their church home plan to attend this service.
- 5 May: Great and Holy Pascha

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!